Leopardi, Music and Rossini A focused study and cross-curricular activity (music and literature) – inspired by the article «Leopardi, la musica, il principio del mondo» (Quinte Parallele)

1. A poet who listens Giacomo Leopardi (Recanati 1798 – Naples 1837) was not a musician, but music runs through all his work. In the Zibaldone, his great «diary of thoughts», he writes that music is the art that affects our feelings most directly: it does not imitate something, as painting does, but immediately creates an emotion. For him, sound is closely linked to what is undefined and vague: like a distant voice or a song fading away, it opens the imagination to the infinite.

2. Sounds and songs in the poems Poem Sound What it evokes

L'infinito (1819) Sound: The rustling of the wind among the plants What it evokes: The contrast between that sound and the «infinite silence» turns the poet's thoughts towards eternity.

La sera del dì di festa (1820) Sound: The song of a craftsman returning home, gradually fading away What it evokes: The feeling that time passes and carries everything away.

Il passero solitario (1829) Sound: The sparrow's song, the bells, the celebratory gunshots What it evokes: The loneliness of the poet and of youth.

Il sabato del villaggio (1829) Sound: The carpenter's hammer, the children playing What it evokes: Looking forward to the day of celebration, which is more enjoyable than the day itself.

A Silvia (1828) Sound: Silvia's «constant singing» echoing through the rooms What it evokes: Memories of youth and its hopes.

3. The encounter with Rossini In 1822–23, Leopardi stays in Rome. He is disappointed by the city, but one evening he goes to the Teatro Argentina to hear La donna del lago by Gioachino Rossini. In a letter to his brother Carlo (5 February 1823), he describes being deeply affected by the music, to the point of being moved to tears: an experience he had not had when looking at Rome's monuments. Rossini was then Europe's best-loved composer, and his work embodied the kind of music that speaks directly to the heart.

Fun fact: Leopardi and Rossini were almost neighbours: Recanati and Pesaro are both in the Marche region, and the two were born just six years apart.

4. Classroom activities A. Listening and words. Listen to the «Cavatina di Elena» or a chorus from La donna del lago, and then to «Largo al factotum» from Barbiere di Siviglia. Write three adjectives for each piece. Which of the two do you think moved Leopardi? Why?

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_____ B. The soundscape. Reread «La sera del dì di festa» or «Il sabato del villaggio» and underline all the sounds. Then, in a group, recreate the poem's soundscape using your voices, objects and classroom instruments while a classmate reads the lines of poetry.

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C. Distant sounds. Leopardi loves sounds that come from far away and fade into silence. Listen quietly for one minute by an open window: what sounds can you hear? Which are nearby, and which are far away? Write a short text (it can also be a poem) that takes one of these sounds as its starting point.

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_____ D. Letter to a friend. Imagine you are Leopardi on the evening after hearing Rossini's opera: write a short letter to your brother Carlo describing how you felt.

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Self-assessment ☐ I can explain why music was important to Leopardi. ☐ I can identify the sounds in his poems. ☐ I can describe his encounter with Rossini's music. ☐ I helped create the soundscape.

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